Ninth Edition

Media Programming

STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

Susan Tyler Eastman • Douglas A. Ferguson

9TH
EDITION

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Preface

This book about media programming deals with both the structured and unstructured media. By **structured** we mean the traditional mass communication media of broadcast television and radio and the cable networks. These services have long sent prepackaged programs to viewers and listeners in linear series organized by time and day. We focus on ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC and PBS, and include CW, MyNetworkTV, Telemundo, TeleFutura and Univision and affiliated stations, the major cable networks, such as CNN, MTV, TNT, USA, HBO and so on, the satellite TV and telephone TV services, such as DirecTV and AT&T, and the radio and audio networks. Although these channels' programs can be recorded and replayed, on a structured service, each program was originally selected to fit in a single channel to create an image and set of expectations about that channel. Of considerable importance is the fact that many programs get replayed on co-owned channels or are later sold in syndication. Of even more importance is that this structured industry is moving toward on-demand programming, thus becoming more like the unstructured industry.

By **unstructured** we mean the parts of the huge online world that carry old and new television programs and radio shows, talk and music that come via the web to your laptop or tablet or cell phone—or perhaps your TV set. While we focus primarily on the unstructured services that provide television programs and movies, such as Netflix, Google and Hulu.com, we include the personal media of YouTube, Facebook and MySpace, as well as online gaming such as Farmville, Carville and Cityville, plus X-Box, Nintendo and their kin. We incorporate these in the unstructured group because they consist of giant masses of content from which users select however they prefer. Online media is inherently VOD (video on demand). Nonetheless, much of the online world is filled with non-programming and falls outside the purview of this book. But we do refer to blogs and podcasts, insofar as they are carriers of content that relates to the structured and unstructured programming media.

The primary reason for including both structured media content and rivaling unstructured content is that they share an economic and marketing universe. They compete for the attention of the same viewers, listeners and users, and they compete for the same dollars, although the revenue streams operate in different ways. And they are coming closer together. Indeed, over the next decades, broadcasting and cable will fade as broadband distribution rises, but for now, all must coexist and share the audience's attention.

Change continues to be the media's most enduring characteristic, and the contents of this book have most value when they not only describe and interpret the present but also predict the patterns of the future. The next media revolution is well begun, and the once-rigid barriers between methods of delivering programming are dissolving, as are barriers between domestic and foreign programming. The authors make educated assessments of likely changes in the near future, while science fiction imaginings edge closer and closer. 3D television without glasses is certainly coming but hasn't reached most living rooms yet.

The Changes

Six major shifts in the industry guided the revision for this edition. They can be summarized as conclusions or operating principles:

- **Multiplatform strategies inform media decisions today.** The conventional TV networks reacted to the newest media by trying limited multiplatform marketing, but changing economics and audience behaviors now make cable and the internet parallel to broadcasting, and if not yet equivalent, they are the future in programming and profits. Where once the broadcast networks viewed cable and the internet merely as vehicles for marketing their content, broadband and cable are now either full partners or full competitors to the broadcast media. Now every kind of receiver (computers, phones, tablets and TV sets) must be considered in every decision to buy, make or schedule programming.
- **Cross-media have become enmeshed media.** Diverse media outlets have been assimilated within giant media corporations. Broadcast network and stations, cable networks and systems and online video services now operate within single commercial conglomerates. This has led to conflicting goals within corporations in which programming decisions sometimes advantage some owned segments and disadvantage others to maximize overall profits. The full ramifications of Comcast's purchase of NBCUniversal, for example, will not emerge for a decade. While cross-fertilization and reuse of broadcast programs on both cable and online is old news, the three kinds of media are now more deeply embedded—to the point where some distinctions have been erased. Television companies no longer act without full consideration of online impacts. And now radio is becoming audio and no longer separate from online, iPods or the telephone.
- **New media only partly subsume old media.** Television has gone from black-and-white to color to digital to HD and is going to 3D (although most screens lag behind and don't display HD signals, let alone 3D), while television is simultaneously going online. And only about three quarters of U.S. household have broadband access, not all of that high speed. LP records quite thoroughly replaced 78 RPM, but then CDs replaced records, and now online downloads to iPods and cell phones are replacing CDs. Radio has in part gone from analog to digital and from broadcast to satellite and to online, but HD radio has not yet been widely adopted in home, although it has become standard for new cars. In each big change, the strength and speed of the takeover has varied and in many cases, the old medium persists alongside the new.
- **Analog is dead, and digital is becoming HD.** The makers and distributors of media content now largely ignore the millions of analog receivers in homes (and cars) and presume they will inevitably join the digital age. Although cable, satellite and telephone distributors offer hundreds of channels as digital signals, the media companies expect to drop most plain digital in favor of high definition in the not-distant future. Households today may contain a mix of analog and digital media, but over-the-air television and radio consumers are getting left behind. While only about a third of digital subscribers now take high-definition service, the industry expects full conversion in a few years. While only half of households have high-speed internet access now, more than 90 percent will have it in a few years. Although the digital gap is shrinking, it persists between older and younger people and urban and rural households, despite sporadic regulatory efforts.
- **Reducing, reusing and recycling are now the driving strategies behind programming decisions.** While the traditional networks broadcast the classically defined the main program genres, new types of programs are emerging in spite of old terminology. Game shows and reality programs have merged and exploded across television.

Meanwhile, YouTube mushrooms with new program ideas, and Facebook illustrates the audience's need for interaction. While program types are expanding, schedules everywhere fill with reused tried-and-true favorites. Because the networks strive to reduce the total number of expensive programs they need to fill their schedules, an essential part of current strategy has become replaying of episodes more often and recycling shows on co-owned cable channels and online.

- **Wirelessness and pay are the directions of the future.** Although the traditional wired media of cable, satellite and telephone remain strong media businesses for now, wireless ways to receive television and audio are becoming commonplace. It is likely that virtually all entertainment media will become wireless (perhaps delivered via light rather than in the presently used parts of the spectrum!) and almost all media will require some sort of pay in your lifetime.

Chapter Organization

The organization of this edition of *Media Programming* has been altered to catch up with changes in ownership patterns and technology distribution, as well as to give greater prominence to the unstructured media because of their current interest to readers.

- Part One introduces the strategies and principles guiding the structured and unstructured media and tells what programmers need to know.
- Part Two looks at programming from the perspectives of prime-time broadcast—the gorilla on the block—as well as multichannel cable/satellite and online networks.
- Part Three builds understanding of the processes and problems of ratings and syndication, and if you don't understand them, you don't understand anything.
- Part Four focuses on the practices of specific kinds of programming situations.
- Part Five addresses the rapidly morphing audio media of music and information.

Although so much is changing right under our noses, this book largely preserves the classic media subdivisions as a convenience for chapters and because the process of amalgamation and reemergence remains ongoing … ongoing. Someday, as in science fiction, all kinds of media will merge into mega-conglomerate media businesses serving all the different kinds of receivers. TV sets, laptops, tablets and smart phones—and who knows what—will be just different sizes and shapes of wireless computers. But we aren't there yet, not by a long shot.

Two indexes appear at the book's end, along with a brief bibliography and a long list of internet media sites. The authors also maintain a website at *www.media-programming.com* where updates and links are posted. The site can also be searched from *www.wadsworth.com*. Also at the book's close you'll find brief bios of the editors and authors.

The word television now encompasses much more than it did a handful of years ago. The impacts of digitalization, internet penetration and media consolidation continue to work their ways into viewers' homes and will remain the dominant forces operating to change programming strategies and practices in the coming decade. At the same time, the slow growth in the number of U.S. viewers and listeners is giving greater emphasis to serving the fast-growing Hispanic and Latino audiences and greater importance to providing programming for other countries. Concurrently, competition from foreign-made programs is attracting more U.S. viewers while rising local media industries in other countries are creating stiffer competition abroad for U.S. media companies. These will continue to be major pulls and pressures on overall programming strategy for the coming decade.

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We dedicate this edition to the two Rebeccas, as well as to Lewis Klein and the memory of Sydney Head, who together had the original idea for this book so many decades ago.

Susan Tyler Eastman
Douglas A. Ferguson

PART

1

Introduction to Programming

Part One Outline

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CHAPTER 1

A Scaffold for Programmers

Susan Tyler Eastman and Douglas A. Ferguson

Chapter Outline

It's a wake-up call the first time someone says to you, "Wait. I'm watching a movie on my iPod." Or maybe it was an iPhone. Or an iPad. Americans use electronic screens of one sort or another for an average of at least eight hours a day. This book focuses on decisions affecting the content of those screens. The chapters look at the strategies of all kinds of television (broadcast, cable, online) and audio (radio, satellite, internet), as well as the daily practices of the electronic media industry. Although new technologies often capture our immediate attention, in the media world "*content is king*," and we'll show you why. This chapter introduces the kind of *programming specific to the electronic media*—not what computer programmers normally do—and outlines the complex media industry.

What Is Programming?

Programming can refer to an outcome or a process. It can describe either *a group of programs* on a radio station, a television network, or cell phone, as in "I really enjoy the programming on that new cable channel"—or *the act of choosing and scheduling programs* on a broadcast TV station, subscription channel, or online service, as in "My job is programming; I pick most of the shows my channel carries." Like the programmer who handles many cable channels, the online programmer also has the job of choosing but for a video library rather than a single channel.

The processes of selecting, scheduling, promoting and evaluating programs define the work of a programmer, and they are the subject of this book, whether the programmer is a paid employee or you, the viewer! The word *programs* refers to units of **content**—some as short as tweets and YouTube videos, others as long as TV series and Hollywood movies. As you choose which online sources to watch, load up your iPod, or subscribe to Netflix or Spotify, you are programming for yourself, but someone else placed that content where you could get at it.

At a radio station or small cable channel, the person paid to handle the programming tasks might be called a program director or general manager (or "hey, you"); at a television station or network, the decisions are made the very highest corporate levels (the people called "sir") because so many tens of thousands of dollars, even millions, are involved in each decision. Regardless of the person's position title, the job will be to choose content that targets the desired audience, design a schedule, make sure the content is effectively marketed, and monitor the outcome—a job description that applies to both the established media and the newest media. Of course, it's highly likely that being talented at the job leads to more successes.

If a channel has weakly pulling shows, it needs new programming, in the most tangible sense, because owners usually seek large audiences for their advertisers. Always remember: *The main function of commercial media is to deliver an audience to advertisers*. Even Facebook and YouTube are supported by advertising. The new shows a programmer chooses must appeal to more viewers (or listeners in the case of radio, users in the case of the web) than did the old shows. Somebody organizes the hour to hour display of new videos on YouTube, just as somebody chooses the hourly sequence of television channels. But day to day, once the big decisions are instituted and the shows running, evaluation of some kind of audience ratings takes the front seat for programmers.

The Big Changes

The media world doesn't hold still, which keeps it interesting. In case you failed to notice, three changes in society and the industry have dramatically affected programming and continue to do so: *digitization, internet access* and *media competition*.

Digital Media

Digitization has displaced analog television broadcasting and changed the equipment that consumers use to receive television. Anything can be a "television" now, or so it seems. Box 1.1 asks whether you are really at the cutting edge. Digitizing television

1.1 Are You Really Watching HDTV?

A lot of people think they are watching HD when they're not. It takes three things to have an HD picture:

1. *A digital HD screen for your TV or computer set*, duh.
2. *A program shot by an HD camera*: Older cameras were not in HD format, and even today, many local events, including regional sports, are commonly produced using older non-HD cameras—even if the screen looks like the right spread-out aspect ratio. So if you watch a lot of old movies, you probably aren't getting them in real HD, even if they've been remastered.
3. *A contract for HD service* from your local cable, phone or satellite service. If you aren't paying for HD service, you're getting only a digital signal but not an HD signal. You have to pay extra for HD.

Look at detail in the close-ups: Can you see the whiskers grow?

Look for detail in the distant background: Can you see the faces and clothes of individual fans at a game?

Look for figure/ground separation: Do the foreground figures stand well apart from the background?

Get used to real HD because 3D is coming! And holography of some sort after that.

gave rise to DVRs (digital video recorders), which in turn enormously increased time-shifting of traditional television programs, as described in 1.2. Having people watch a show on different days at different times and via different media has had a powerful and often confusing impact on ratings and program scheduling. Consumers' desire for time-shifting led to such innovations as *on-demand television*, which in turn changed the meaning of a TV channel. Video-on-demand (VOD) is more like a library than a set of channels. Moreover, viewers now want HD (high definition) or even 3D reception on large screens in their homes as well as public places, leading to new production criteria for programs and much affecting what Hollywood does.

Nonetheless, nearly 8 percent in the United States, mostly in big cities where signals are strong, still get along without cable or satellite television (or the telcos' UVerse or FiOS) in their homes. (They have to go to bars to get the good stuff!) And only newer cars have HD radio. Smart phones and tablets now show some TV shows and other kinds of programming, another byproduct of digitization of television and the telephone. At the same time, smart TV sets let users switch between television and the internet. *The new media only partly replace the old media, but they have generated new ways for audiences to use media.*

Internet Access

That the internet has given rise to enormous changes almost goes without saying. Although everyday use of the internet has been widespread for more than two decades, it has become faster (although not fast enough for most people), wireless, and easier to use (except for the 25 percent of Americans still lacking high-speed internet access in their homes). For media programmers, the internet provides four things:

- replay of major movies and network television series and specials;
- original programs made for the web by amateurs or professionals (user-generated content and web series);
- websites that carry updates and background about television stars, program plots, and schedules (enhancements); and
- a gazillion places for program promotion and advertising.

Both program promotion and program replay matter: They influence the all-important ratings. Internet usage measures provide another kind of "rating."

As the whole world seems to know, the spread of the internet via wireless signals led to social media

1.2 The DVR Factor

Digital video recorders (DVRs) change viewing habits. Those who own them grow very fond of (and dependent upon) them. Those who have original or updated TiVos are often fiercely loyal to them—more so even than the owners of unbranded models from cable and satellite operators. Those who do not own them cannot understand all the fuss. They'll find out, eventually. Some forecasters predict that DVRs will be in 80 percent of television homes by about 2015.

To the uninitiated, DVRs appear to be glorified VCRs or recording DVDs, with video stored on a random-access hard drive. But DVRs can pause and instantly replay live TV, allowing more viewer control. DVRs play back while recording, allowing the viewer to time-shift more easily than ever before. The internal menu systems driven by daily downloaded program information make recording so very easy. DVRs beat VCRs hands down: no codes, no stop-start times, no clocks to set; just choose a program from the menu of upcoming options (or during a live promo or during the actual show) and hit record. Record a show once or every time it is shown, regardless of what time or day. There is no need to know what night a show is on because the DVR does all the thinking. It even can be told to ignore any show reruns during daily or weekly recordings. Viewers simply visit their DVR program menu and find what they want, when they want it. Dayparts are irrelevant. Channels are irrelevant. And commercials are meant to be skipped.

Even more important to conventional viewing patterns is that DVRs usually come bundled alongside enormous packages of digital services, including VOD. Because the TV services commonly have informational bands that appear for a few seconds across the bottom of screens, they do two things: Besides distracting the viewer from immediate involvement in the upcoming program, they certainly make using the up/down channel changing buttons (old-style surfing) quite unappealing. *Digital cable rapidly becomes menu-driven television, not channel-driven.*

Satellite services also come bundled with DVRs to make pay-per-view possible, and cable operators supply DVRs to digital, HD and 3D subscribers for a fee, with the goal of encouraging pay-per-view sales. Indeed, manufacturers of television receivers promise to build the DVR functions into the sets themselves. Many viewers don't want an additional box connected to their TV sets.

So what happens to programming strategies? Are the traditional practices of hammocking, tentpoling, bridging and leading-in (see Chapter 2) relevant in a DVR-enabled home? Some say not, but some say not so fast. Will the added expense keep most people away or will bundling of services make the price for adding a DVR insignificant? Guide listings are not universally popular. DVRs vastly improve them. How will widespread use of DVRs become? One for every TV in the house? A few viewers may remain content with the way things were before DVRs, but not many. Stay tuned in the coming years and find out.

communication. Once upon at time, AT&T and other phone companies were the social media. You called people on the telephone. Facebook, Twitter and the like have taken over as the vital parts of interpersonal communication, affecting daily personal life and even underpinning national uprisings in the Middle East and elsewhere. But *time spent on social media takes away from time for consuming traditional broadcast and cable programs*.

Competition with the internet for precious audience time has forced drastic changes in television programming. For example, competition drove the explosion of such cheap-to-produce quasi-reality shows as *Survivor* and *American Idol*; it upped the number of reruns during prime time; and it changed audience measurement practices. To compete, the internet found success with elaborate online games such as *Farmville*, a guzzler of user time. (Have you tried puppy watching? It's another time devourer.) Competition for audiences has motivated the adoption of "green" strategies (of a sort) for the big as well as small television corporations: *Programs must now be reduced, reused and recycled (and whatever other R-words you can think of) more than ever before.*

Media Competition

Finally, Comcast bought NBC Universal (creating NBCUniversal, for some odd reason). This giant step reflected consolidation not just within an industry segment but across competitive boundaries. And it was a "buy up" rather than lateral or down: A *cable operator* bought a major *broadcast network*, along with its ownership in a dozen cable networks. A newcomer bought an old-old-timer. Since the 1980s, broadcasting and cable have been primary rivals, battling head to head for viewers, but it normally takes a large group of cable networks to match the ratings of a single broadcast network in prime time. So for several reasons, this merger shocked many industry insiders. *Cross-media has now become enmeshed media.*

The number of cable networks exceeds 500, though many are co-owned by other networks or very small splinter services. The top 25 get by far the most viewing and have the most subscribers. No one can say how many program services there are online, but about a half-dozen are best known for providing web series, while YouTube, iTunes and their cohort supply virtually infinite and changing quantities of videos. In contrast, the number of broadcast networks seems to have stabilized at ten (or nine depending on who you count): The Big Four of ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC; plus CW, MyNetworkTV and PBS; plus Univision, Telemundo and TeleFutura, the three Spanish-language networks. (PBS often gets left out, leaving nine commercial networks.) But, around the edges, Google seeks to make YouTube into a broadcast network, and Netflix would like to join this exclusive group, so the number of networks could change.

One significant point is the growth in audiences for Spanish-language networks: Univision is the fifth largest network, far bigger than CW or MNTV or any single cable network. A major point is that Comcast's purchase of NBCUniversal from General Electric, as well as AT&T's, Google's and Netflix's aspirations, signal a major shift in the relationships among the controlling media entities, and these moves are the likely forerunners of more consolidation. And new relationships between the social media and the commercial media are in the wind.

Ownership powerfully affects programming. In addition to political slant, such as with Fox cable and MSNBC, the financial clout of an owner and the size of its total audience influence the purchase price of programs: *Money matters*. And the number of co-owned outlets directly affects a program's distribution: *Audience size matters*. The larger the financial risk, the more conservative big owners become. *Consolidation leads to more reduce, reuse and recycle rather than to innovation.*

The Themes

The pressures arising from these three big changes are *themes* throughout this book. All chapters in this book examine how programs (units of content) are selected (or not selected), how content is arranged in schedules or menus of various kinds (or all over some screen), how the content is promoted to audiences or users and advertisers, and how content and audiences are evaluated (at least by the industry, even if that's not how you see things). We are especially concerned with the limits arising from technology, financing, regulations, policies and marketing needs, and you should be too.

- One central premise is that how content is paid for determines much of its structure and availability, and the long-term trend is to pay for use (whether you like it or not).
- Another thrust is how the mass orientation and traditionally rigidly linear structuring of the broadcast media is adapting to emergence of personal and mobile media. (How much difference do you see?)
- We focus on the methods and processes of consumption of digital video and audio media, which are dissolving fixed ideas about "channels" and "dayparts."
- Still other recurring themes arise from the ways the once-clear distinctions between networks, syndicators and cable companies are fading, and while some former competitors are becoming enmeshed through partnerships and mergers, certain pressures keep other competitors well apart.

- Another recurring topic is how programmers struggle frantically on a daily basis for bigger shares of the overall American audience and specific sub-audiences.
- We are always concerned with how the big media conglomerates are co-opting and commercializing online, mobile, social and noncommercial program content.
- At the same time, the persistent patterns of daily work and living continue to influence the availability and arrangement of most media entertainment content (and you don't even notice).
- Finally, the realities of economics always overshadow all aspects of media programming.

Look for examples of how these themes emerge in the following chapters about specific media situations.

The Process of Programming

Programming is both a skill and an art. *The primary goal in programming advertiser-supported media is to maximize the size of an audience targeted by advertisers.* The only way to accomplish this goal is to satisfy the needs and wants of that audience, whatever they are today and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Present-day technology permits viewers themselves to choose programs from dozens of sources (such as broadcast stations, cable/satellite channels, SiriusXM, Netflix, YouTube), giving consumers more-or-less instant access to hundreds—even thousands—of programs. But oddly enough, most people prefer to let someone else do the programming chore. *Viewers tend to choose channels and websites, but expect someone else to have filled those channels/sites in an expert way.* Even YouTube viewers may choose a topic or known video to start with, but then they typically click on whatever follows (despite the commercials).

In the case of mass-appeal channels, such as the major television networks and larger cable networks and internet services, programmers go after as many viewers as possible. Most advertisers assume that the demographic groups they want to reach will be well represented in the total audience, if it's large.

To cover all bases, most big media companies have expanded their brands into groups of channels, such as the 5 channels of ESPN, the 11 channels of HBO/Cinemax HD, or the dozen or so channels owned all in or part by NBCUniversal and its owner Comcast. In the case of specialty cable and internet channels (called niche networks) such as the Military History Channel, Black Entertainment Television, Comedy Central and the Tennis Channel (or still smaller networks focusing on pets or cooking or cars or houses or shopping), the programmer may be more interested in pleasing a particular audience subgroup than in reaching an audience outside the targeted group. Of course, *the larger the size of that target audience, the easier it is to make money.*

Very narrowly targeted channels cannot survive long, even on the internet, unless they carry advertising (but if audiences are small, few advertisers will buy) and/or charge subscription fees—if enough people are willing to pay to get the service. But audiences tend to expect most programs to come for free, so other means of generating money are essential.

All programmers must deal with certain limitations, most of them economic. *Program resources are scarce. Good shows cost a lot of money. Unfortunately, bad shows are also expensive* (except on YouTube). Good or bad, the four largest broadcast networks combined (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC) spend more than $10 billion annually on programs and rights to major events. Their collective share of the total audience shrank for several years but has currently flattened at about one-third of viewers at any given time. Audiences are available to consume media for only so many hours per day, and less of that viewing went to the Big Four networks as cable networks and then games and social media captured more of the audience. At the same time, Univision's TV audiences are swelling in size. In the case of television programming for which viewers pay a fee, there is a limit to how much they will spend before they start complaining to Congress about subscription fees.

One byproduct of smaller network audiences in the United States has been greater efforts to market U.S. program content in other countries. CNN is a worldwide service; Disney runs Spanish-language channels in South America and other parts of the world. Although ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC are quintessentially American channels, and their U.S. popularity depends on them staying so, their parent corporations can be increasingly involved with cable and broadcast channels in other countries. Just as U.S. car makers pushed for years to get into the gigantic Chinese car market, media program producers yearn to follow in their footsteps.

The following figure (see 1.3) illustrates the not-always-happy relationship between U.S. television viewers and television program services as a tug of war. The cartoon suggests that as audiences adopt new technologies, programmers must respond with new strategies for enticing and holding those audiences. Similarly, changing economic, regulatory, and social conditions usually result in acrimonious tensions between the sources of programs and their viewers, listeners and users.

How Programming Is Unique

If Irving Berlin was correct when he wrote that there's no business like show business, then what makes a programming product unique? How are programs different from other products that corporations make for the public?

Certainly, *ease of delivery* is key for broadcasting. What other product can be simultaneously delivered to nearly every consumer? Who else can attract the biggest audiences? The very biggest sports and entertainment events still go to the broadcast networks, for now.

In theory, anyone can conceive an idea and sell it to a cable channel or a broadcast network or put it online, but the big distributors (cable and broadcast networks through their systems and stations) continue to exert a large measure of control over which programs run. Barriers to entry still limit budding suppliers.

Nonetheless, it is possible for some programmers to start small and build national audiences. Oprah Winfrey started at a small station doing a local talk show before achieving national television prominence and creating her own production company and then more recently her own cable television channel (see 8.9 for more on *Oprah*). Facebook was only begun in 2004 and now reaches more than three quarters of U.S. homes and represents maybe (at least at unsettled times) half of all internet use worldwide. Beginning with a website is the likely path for many future entrepreneurs.

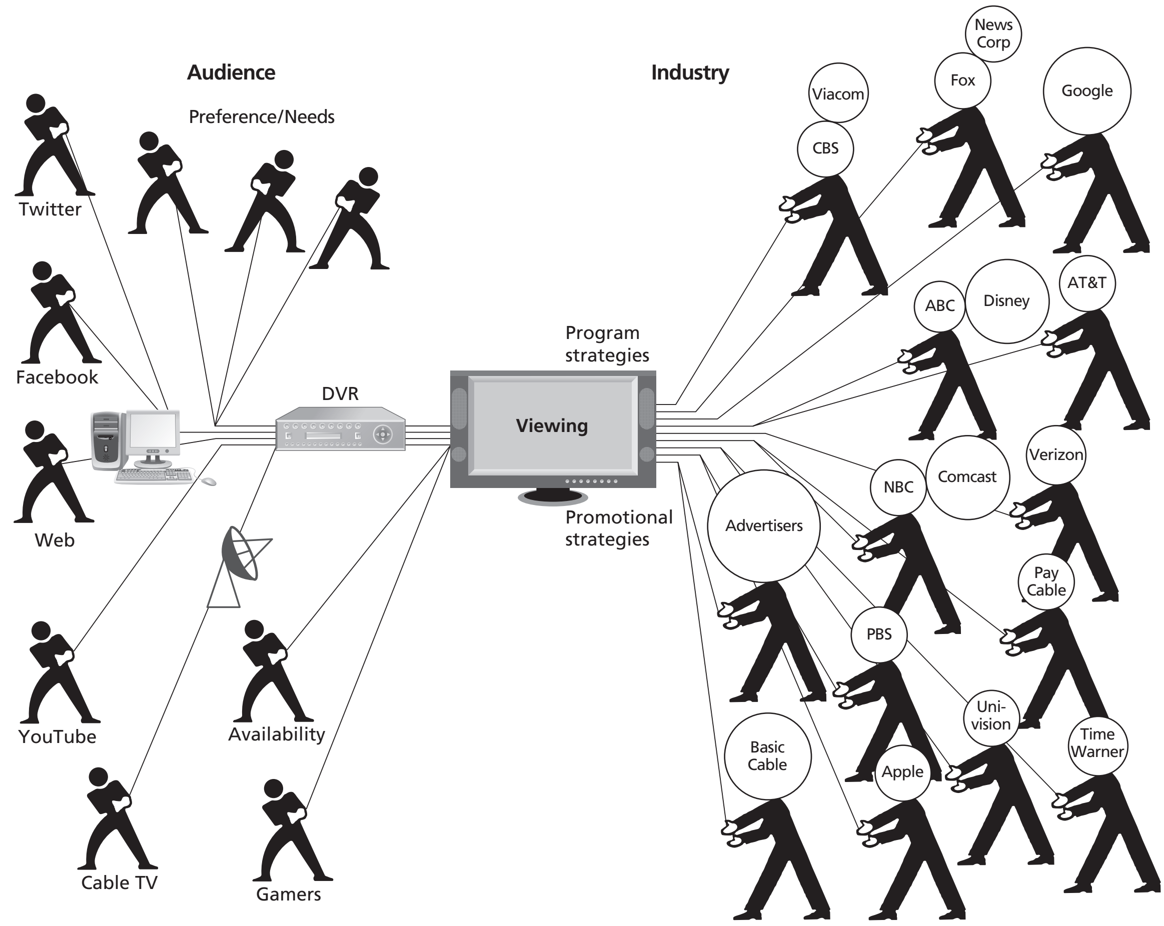
Reaching a national audience is becoming less difficult. Internet cafes and Wi-Fi are proliferating, and a growing number of program suppliers are looking for nontraditional program providers. Netflix, Hulu and other online video rentals and sales services offer another potential avenue for program suppliers, and the internet's ability to stream audio and video programming—looking and sounding both the same and different from traditional programs—improves continuously. On the other hand, to remain competitive, the broadcasters have long been *first adopters of content production for new screen technologies*—first color, then HD, and now 3D programs.

Broadcast programming remains unique because there is *no apparent direct cost* to consumers for the most popular shows. Although cable and online programmers siphon away some desirable programs, the big broadcast networks are able to provide very popular drama, reality and comedy programs, along with top sporting events and live news coverage, seemingly absolutely free to the audience. Despite all the new media, *television remains the most used medium* (close to 6 hours daily), and advertisers know it. They pay for the programs in exchange for having their commercials presented to the audience.

Although the high cost of advertising is passed along to consumers, the advertiser's ability to market products to huge audiences actually decreases the per-item cost of many products because of *economies of scale*. It usually costs more for producers to market products to a small number of people.

Why should radio or television programmers care how "free" the programs are to the receivers? In the case of broadcast programming, the low cost to viewers generates audiences large enough to sell to advertisers. *Contrary to popular belief, broadcasters are not in the business of creating programs; they are in the business of creating audiences that advertisers want to reach.* Even in the case of cable/satellite channels and online sites, advertiser support is critical

1.3 Tug of War



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to programmers because costs are seldom borne entirely by subscriber or user fees.

Programming is a unique product in that it is used to lure the attention of consumers so that advertisers can show those consumers commercial messages that help sell other products. Programmers work only indirectly for the audience; *the primary customer is the advertiser*, without whom there would be few programs to see or hear. Prime-time television might look like YouTube.

What Does the Audience Want?

The most important part of programming is understanding the audience. What appeals to viewers or listeners or online users? Quite simply, on the surface audiences want to be entertained, and they want to be informed. Speaking very generally, these two elements comprise the whole of programming content (see 1.4 and 1.5). But the devil is in the details, of course.

1.4 Recipe for Successful Production

A step-by-step procedure for the process of programming would go something like this. First, choose programs that seem to meet the needs and wants of an audience. Second, organize those programs into a coherent schedule that flows from one program into the next. Third, market the programs to the appropriate audience. Finally, evaluate the results and make necessary adjustments. This is the basic recipe for cooking the perfect program schedule.

1. Target a demographically desirable audience.
2. Choose appropriate programs for that audience.
3. Evaluate reasonable costs for program types and time slots.
4. Evaluate the competition to determine a scheduling strategy.
5. Make sure a program fits in with neighboring programs.
6. Employ talented performers whom the public likes.
7. Hire producers/directors/writers with a record of success.
8. Deal with currently popular subject matter.
9. Emulate comparable high-rated programs.

1.5 What Is Quality?

Whenever the word *quality* is attached to programming, viewers think they know what that means. Do they? Quality often connotes strong production values (lavish sets, famous performers, riveting scriptwriting, technical achievement) and critical acclaim. Those who fight to save quality programs often see some substantial social value in such shows.

So why is quality lacking in most television shows? Is it money, or could it be that the masses want circuses instead of high culture? Perhaps quality signifies only that a group of viewers finds some subjective value that is independent of objective criteria. If we cannot agree on what constitutes quality, does it really exist? Maybe those who use the phrase "quality television" really mean to say "programs that we really like."

Programmers are well advised to be careful with the word quality as long as so little consensus exists about what it is. It might be better to strive toward shows that are popular (or critically acclaimed) by external standards, rather than programs that have intrinsic quality.

The demand for entertainment encompasses a mixture of comedy and drama. Narrative stories represent the norm, and these stories have a beginning, a middle and an end occurring within each episode.[1] Characters have goals resulting from a desire. Along the way, they encounter some form of conflict. In a comedy program, the conflict is a humorous situation resolved in a way that causes the audience to laugh. Sitcoms usually appear in half-hour episodes. In a drama, the conflict results from a counterforce, often "the bad guys." Most dramas last an hour, occasionally longer. Nonnarrative reality programs are more like situation comedies with game show elements: they consist of a situation in which "people" compete to win. But the most successful of these shows also embody a narrative about participants carried over from week to week.

By the turn of this century, the former reality format (*Survivor* and *Fear Factor*) had resurfaced on a wave of game shows (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*), which was soon overtaken by other types of blockbuster reality programs (*Dancing with the Stars* and *American Idol*) and two hit game shows (*Deal or No Deal* and *Jeopardy*). Many of these reality shows are competitions that generate a sense of